

# Racial Affinity Groups: Sample Purposes, Guidelines, Process

## Potential Purposes of Racial Affinity Structures:

- Build community, understanding and support within and across racial affinity groups; identify similarities and differences of experiences within racial identity groups
- Provide opportunities for people of color to convene and heal from experiences of racism at work and in life, outside of the gaze of white colleagues, and without the need to attend to white fragility
- Provide opportunities for white people to support each other's learning about racism, challenge each other's thinking, and explore the impact of whiteness and learned biases on their relationships and work

## Sample Guidelines for Discussion in Affinity Groups:

- *Be mindful of airtime; say what's true for you and ensure you hear from everyone who wants to speak.*
- *Speak for yourself ("I" statements); be mindful of intersectionality and differences within racial affinity.*
- *Personal stories remain confidential.*
- *If you're offended, uncomfortable or upset, say so and say why (staying with "I" statements).*
- *Everyone supports facilitator to keep conversation going. (Facilitators are not "training" the group, just supporting conversation.)*

## Sample Structure / Process:

- Whole-group introduction to the purposes and process of racial affinity groups.
  - Acknowledge that, depending on the group, there may not be groups for every racial identity; encourage people to connect with a group that shares some racial affinity or that they feel comfortable speaking with.
  - An initial step in processing racism is to configure in distinct groups of POC (those who experience racism directly) and white people (those who receive advantages based on racism).
- Break into racial affinity groups; if possible, have a facilitator for each group. If not, it's important to have at least one facilitator for white group and one facilitator for POC group; the POC group can then break into smaller groups based on racial identity. Ensure some time in smaller racial affinity groups (about 3-5 people) to give everyone significant time to share and process within an identity group.
- While still in racial affinity groups, engage in discussion based on prompts or a common text / reading.

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- Come back together as a whole group, or invite people to reconfigure into smaller groups again with people from different affinity groups in each small group to share some conversation highlights and debrief the experience. As a whole group, determine possible next steps to continue conversations and understanding.

## Sample prompts for discussion in racial affinity groups

Adapted from *Everyday Democracy / Study Circles Resource Center: Dialogue for Affinity Groups*; and *Mindful of Race: Transforming Racism From The Inside Out*, Ruth King (Sounds True, 2018).

- 1) Describe your racial or ethnic background.
- 2) When was the first time you realized you belong to a certain racial / ethnic group? What did that mean to you?
- 3) When was the first time you noticed people who were different from you? What do you remember?
- 4) What early experiences led you to understand racism in your community / culture / society?
- 5) Share a brief story of how racism has affected your life. / Share some ways that racism has had an impact on you.
  - a. For white groups, also consider: When you think about white privilege (or white supremacy), what comes to mind? What experiences led you to understand white privilege / white supremacy in your community / culture / society? Share a brief story of how white privilege has affected your life / share some ways privilege has had an impact on you.
- 6) What has been your experience when you talk about racism with people from your same racial identity?
  - a. Where have you found support?
  - b. Where have you found challenges?
- 7) What has been your experience when you talk about racism with people across different racial identities?
  - a. Where have you found support?
  - b. Where have you found challenges?
- 8) What, if anything, do you think is important for other racial identity groups to know about this group? What, if anything, do we want to learn? (Note: important to identify differences in experience within the same group – but also check for common patterns.)
- 9) How does your racial identity affect your work relationships? How does it impact the approach you take to your work?

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10) DEBRIEF: What was this racial affinity group experience like for you?